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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/PPD, EUR/CARC

E.O. 12958; N/A

TAGS: OPRC AM KMDR KPAO

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION TO A/S FRIED'S STATEMENTS ON FRENCH
"GENOCIDE" DENIAL BILL

Sensitive but unclassified, please protect accordingly.

SUMMARY

¶11. (U) Armenian media broadly covered A/S Fried's October 20 remarks in Brussels on a bill approved by France's lower chamber of parliament that would criminalize denial of the "Armenian genocide."

Major television stations and a number of newspapers and news agencies covered Fried's remarks, with most basing their reports on an article published in Turkey's Zaman newspaper (Fried made his remarks in response to a question from a Zaman journalist in Brussels). Press reports, which generally provided quotes without commenting, stated that Fried said the proposed legislation did not make sense and called on France not to take sides, but to facilitate Turkish-Armenian dialogue. In one of the only opinion pieces on the topic, Russian-language Novoye Vremya newspaper sarcastically criticized Fried for attempting to please both Turkey and Armenia.
END SUMMARY.

"BILL DOESN'T MAKE SENSE"

¶12. (U) Armenian media reports largely focused on Zaman's statement that A/S Fried said that the French bill did not make sense (though many outlets translated Fried's words less aptly as "meaningless"). PanArmenian.net, an independent news website, began its article by stating, "The bill criminalizing the denial of the Armenian Genocide 'is senseless,' U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Eurasia Daniel Fried stated at a news conference in Brussels." Haykakan Zhamanak, a pro-opposition sensationalist daily, also focused on this remark by Fried. In a short article entitled, "Senseless," the newspaper quotes Fried as saying, "I certainly share the view that this legislation criminalizing discussion doesn't seem to make any sense." Novoye Vremya, a pro-government Russian-language newspaper, criticized Fried for this remark, saying that he "betrayed diplomacy" when he stated that the bill did not make sense.

FRIED CALLS ON FRANCE TO PROMOTE DIALOGUE

¶13. (U) Media outlets also reported widely that Fried called on France to contribute to dialogue between Turkey and Armenia. Arminfo, an independent news agency, published an article entitled, "American Diplomat Calls on France to Contribute to Dialogue of Turkey and Armenia." The article states, "Also calling on France 'to promote dialogue instead of taking sides,' [Fried] pointed out

that the subject in Turkey was already being discussed and Turkish intellectuals had started adopting different angles to evaluate the events of 1915."

NEWSPAPER CRITICIZES FRIED FOR TRYING TO PLEASE BOTH SIDES

¶4. (U) In a sarcastic front-page opinion piece, Novoye Vremya criticized Fried at length for failing to take sides and trying to please both Armenia and Turkey. The article states that after saying the United States did not describe the events of 1915 as "genocide," "[F]ried probably remembered his friends from the Armenian Assembly of America, who were offered assurances of everlasting friendship this spring," and corrected himself by saying that this did not mean the U.S. Government was belittling or denying the mass killings that took place in 1915. The author sarcastically writes that Fried has been successful in maintaining "balance," saying that while Ambassador Evans fulfilled his "human duty" by using the word "genocide," Fried "did not make such a slip."

COMMENT

¶5. (SBU) As expected, the Armenian media and public were critical of Assistant Secretary Fried's lack of support for the French bill and his statement that the United States does not call the events of 1915 "genocide." The local interpretation was that this was purely an anti-Armenian/pro-Turkish statement; the nuance that the draft French law was objectionable on free speech grounds was lost on Armenian editors, unfortunately.

GODFREY